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SUBJECT: POLAND, LITHUANIA BREAK CONSENSUS ON EU HEADS OF
MISSION REPORT ON EU-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

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(1.4 b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The EU Heads of Mission Report, prepared for the informal September 7-8 EU foreign ministers meeting on EU-Russia policy, was submitted to Brussels without the endorsement of Poland and Lithuania. In an unexpected move, the Polish embassy refused to sign off on the assessment, arguing that the report was too soft on Russia, and the Lithuanian mission agreed. EU diplomats conceded that this was the first report Moscow EU missions submitted to Brussels without a full consensus, but doubted this would significantly affect the ministerial talks in Gymnich or the EU's policy towards Russia. The parochial view here is that Poland overplayed its hand, but that the HOMs tempest will help fuel what is already expected to be an interesting debate on EU-Russia relations. End Summary.

Poland and Lithuania Refuse to Endorse Report

¶2. (C) In preparation for the September 7-8 informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Gymnich, Brussels instructed EU heads of mission (HOMs) in Moscow to prepare a comprehensive assessment of EU-Russian relations "from a local perspective." The report was prepared by the Portuguese, the Slovenians, and the European Commission, with significant input from France, Great Britain, and Germany. EU diplomats involved in the preparation of the report informed us that the final draft of the report was "remarkably good" in that it addressed the positive and negative trends in Russia's domestic and foreign policies. EU colleagues cited as an example that the report included clear language on Russia's democratic backsliding, but the report also outlined areas in which there was noticeable progress in EU-Russian relations, and underscored that Russia remained an important EU strategic partner.

¶3. (C) After a weekend of last-ditch efforts by the 25 HOMs to convince their Polish and Lithuanian counterparts to accept the text, and despite compromise language that met Lithuania's one stated objection to the report, Portugal forwarded the document to Brussels noting that "27 minus 2" HOMs supported the assessment. EU diplomats contrasted this failed effort at consensus to the non-controversial production of the May 2007 report that preceded the EU-Russia Summit in Samara.

Polish and Lithuanian Disagreements

¶4. (C) EU diplomats told us that the Poles' objection was that they found the text "too soft" on Russia and that the report did not adequately reflect Polish concerns over Russia's embargo of Polish meat. The Polish embassy asserted that the other EU member states were too focused on securing a new Peace and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Russia,

arguing that EU should wait until Russia "desired a new PCA as much as the EU does." Some EU diplomats agreed that the report could have been tougher, but stressed that all member states had to make some compromises to achieve consensus. Since the Polish embassy did not offer any alternative text, EU colleagues said it was difficult to address their concerns, and an effort to have Poland insert dissenting text was rejected by the Polish Embassy. Many EU diplomats attributed the Polish embassy's position on the report to strict instructions from Warsaw.

15. (C) Lithuania also cited last-minute objections to the report, including that the assessment did not address crimes against Lithuanian businessmen in Kaliningrad, which was subsequently resolved in the final negotiating session. EU diplomats believe Lithuania refused to sign off on the report mainly out of solidarity with Poland. They also noted that although Latvia and Estonia maintain strong views on Russia, both countries' missions agreed the HOMs report was a balanced document. EU contacts, burned by the HOMs exercise, stressed that they tried "to take care of the Baltic states" and, in general, prepare a report that was sensitive to the concerns of EU member states formerly part of Russia's sphere of influence.

Impact on the EU Foreign Ministers Meeting?

16. (C) Although the August HOM report was the first time EU HOMs in Moscow submitted a report without full consensus, most EU diplomats told us that the dissent from Poland and Lithuania will not have a significant impact on the discussions in Gymnich. EU diplomats noted that Poland's efforts to hold the report hostage to the Polish-Russian dispute over Polish meat revealed Poland's "unwillingness to

play by EU rules." Convinced that Poland overplayed its hands, most EU contacts predicted that the EU foreign ministers will agree that the HOM represents a "balanced assessment of the situation on the ground." At a minimum, they note, the report underscores the significant divisions over the direction of EU's Russia policy, and the lack of consensus on the HOM report will certainly fuel what already promises to be an interesting discussion in Gymnich.

Burns